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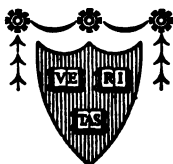
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THE
SIXTIETH ANNIVERSARY
S E R M O N,

PREACHED AT FRANKLIN, MARCH 13, 1842.

BY REV. SAMUEL NOTT, D. D.
PASTOR OF THE CONGREGATIONAL CHURCH.

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Aug 1, 1935

This sermon is most affectionately addressed to the inhabitants of the First Society in Franklin — the children, grand-children, and great-grand-children of those who invited me to settle with them in the gospel ministry, and appears in print in consequence of the following request :

"FRANKLIN, March 28, 1842.

"Sir, — The undersigned, a committee in behalf of the First Ecclesiastical Society in Franklin, tender you their thanks for the appropriate and very impressive sermon delivered by you on the 18th instant, in commemoration of the Sixtieth Anniversary of your connection with this people as their pastor ; and, responding to what they believe to be the general feeling, they solicit a copy for the press.

"They have the honor to be, very respectfully, your obedient servants,

ALVAN ABELL,
OLIVER JOHNSON,
ASHBEL WOODWARD.

"REV. SAMUEL NOTT, D. D."



The same words and tunes were sung at the anniversary that were at my ordination. Before prayer, the choir sung Lenox in the 148th Psalm, P. M. After prayer, Stockbridge, in the 148th, L. M. After the last prayer, the Anthem from the 2d of Luke: "Behold, I bring you good tidings." There were none of the old choir in the seats ; there are two ladies living, but too old and infirm to sing.

S.E R M O N .

Luke ii., 28—32.—Then took he him up in his arms and blessed God, and said, Lord, now lettest thou thy servant depart in peace, according to thy word, for mine eyes have seen thy salvation which thou hast prepared before the face of all people: a light to lighten the Gentiles; and the glory of thy people Israel.

In view of the moral darkness that attends this world, in consequence of the fall of Adam, it is a cheering thought that a remedy is prepared: "before the face of all people: a light to lighten the Gentiles, and the glory of thy people Israel." It pleased God, after the apostasy of our first parents, to say, "The seed of the woman shall bruise the serpent's head." That seed, no doubt, is Jesus Christ.

The Jews, the ancient covenant people of God, were favored with the writings of Moses and the prophets, and long looked for the fulfilment of the foregoing promise. In due time, the Babe of Bethlehem was born of Mary, and "laid in a manger, because there was no room for them in the inn." "When eight days were accomplished, for the circumcising of the child, his name was called Jesus." "Sim-eon, a man just and devout, waiting for the consolation of Israel, took him up in his arms and blessed God, and said, Lord, now lettest thou thy servant depart in peace, according to thy word, for mine eyes have seen thy salvation, which thou hast prepared before the face of all people."

In further attending to the words of the text, it will be the business,

I. To show that the world stood in need of greater light than any they enjoyed before the coming of Christ.

II. That Christ, who claims to be "the light of the world," is a greater light than any they enjoyed before he came.

That the world, before the coming of Christ, actually stood in need

of greater light than any they enjoyed, will appear from a view of the sentiments and practice, both of Gentiles and Jews, before he came. With respect to the Gentiles, though, in general, they believed in the existence of a God, they had very confused and inconsistent ideas of his character. They indeed supposed there existed a plurality of gods—a god for every province, and almost for every profession and thing. “The shepherds had their Pan; the gardeners their Flora; the learned their Mercury and Minerva; the poets their Apollo and the Muses.” Locke, however, on *Human Understanding*, mentions some nations who had no idea of God.* The gods of the heathen, in general, were very imperfect. They, apparently, were but little superior to man, and some of them were represented as guilty of shameful vices. The polytheism of both the ancient and modern pagans, is most remarkable for extravagance and folly. Their gods they conceive to differ in nature, sex, office, and power. Different nations, ancient and modern, have worshiped different gods. Some worshiped the sun—others, the moon; some, the earth—others, the sea; some, virtue—others, vice! In Egypt, plants and animals were worshiped as gods; and so, indeed, were a great variety of other things. The Greeks and Romans, notwithstanding their great learning, were gross idolaters. They worshiped their departed heroes, the generals of their armies, the founders of their empires, and their kings; even their women, who had in some remarkable way distinguished themselves, were viewed as goddesses.

As different nations had different gods, so they had different ways of appeasing them, some of which were most ridiculous. The more the religious systems of the ancient and modern heathen are examined, the more stupid and abominable do their votaries appear. Their gods were emphatically “a vanity and a lie;” and their priests, either ancient or modern, have never understood or taught the principles of true virtue, or pointed out a sure way for a sinner to be pardoned, sanctified, and saved. The Romans, it is well known, as a nation, in many respects, stood high when Christ, “the light of the world,” was born. They were renowned not only for their martial spirit, but for their learning and wisdom. Some of them were men

*“In Brazil, Barandy, and the Caribbee Islands, among whom there was to be found no notion of God, no religion.”—Vol. i., page 50.

of the first erudition; nevertheless, they were grossly ignorant on moral subjects. They were stupid idolaters, and guilty of the most shameful vices. "When they knew God, they glorified him not as God, neither were they thankful, but became vain in their imaginations, and their foolish heart was darkened. Professing themselves to be wise, they became fools, and changed the glory of the incorruptible God into an image made like unto corruptible man, and to birds, and four-footed beasts, and creeping things; wherefore, God also gave them up to uncleanness, through the lusts of their own hearts, to dishonor their own bodies between themselves; who changed the truth of God into a lie, and worshiped the creature more than the Creator, who is blessed forever. For this cause, God gave them up unto vile affections; as they did not like to retain God in their knowledge, God gave them over to a reprobate mind, being filled with all unrighteousness, full of envy, murder, deceit, malignity; whisperers, backbiters, haters of God, proud, boasters, inventors of evil things, disobedient to parents, without natural affection, implacable, unmerciful."—(Rom. i., 21—31.) The Romans, in the time of their greatest wisdom and glory, had no laws to prevent the unnatural and cruel sports of their gladiators, "who fought generally in the arena of Rome, for the entertainment of the people." They often fought in the most desperate manner for the diversion of the gazing multitude; even the women were so void of all tender feelings as apparently to be pleased with the horrid sight.

The Greeks, especially the Athenians, before the coming of Christ, were, like the Romans, distinguished for their improvements in the arts and sciences, but, nevertheless, were gross idolaters, and awfully degenerate in their manners. They had gods almost without number. At one time, it was said, there were in Athens thirty thousand gods, each of which was represented as guilty of crimes for which a man in Greece would have been hanged. And it is natural to suppose that they meant to be sure of having the true one, as Paul found one altar with this remarkable inscription: "To the unknown God." The Greeks, like the Romans, with all their learning, knew of no sure way to appease the anger of their gods. Some of them attempted it by that strange and unnatural way of offering their children to their heathen deities.

In reviewing the history of the ancient pagans, of the greatest literary attainments, it is truly astonishing to witness their ignorance upon all moral subjects. It is calculated forcibly to remind us of the following divine interrogation: "If the light in you be darkness, how great is that darkness." The followers of Epicurus, who lived about three hundred years before the Christian era, attribute the existence of this world, and all visible things, to chance. They did not actually deny the existence of God, but Epicurus himself declared it "beneath his majesty to concern himself about human affairs." The Epicureans seemed to consider the senses as the standard of virtue, and that men ought to seek pleasure as their ultimate object. These notions discover the fallacy of their reasoning, and the awful corruption of their hearts.

The Academics, another sect of philosophers at Athens, taught that it was uncertain whether there were any God; whether the human soul were immortal, and whether virtue were any better than vice!

The Peripetetics, the followers of Aristotle, though they professedly believed in the existence of a God, thought him regardless of the affairs of men.

Plato, a philosopher of high repute, taught that God was confined to a certain portion of space.

The foregoing observations are sufficient to convince every candid person that the Gentiles, before the coming of Christ, were awfully bewildered, and evidently stood in need of greater light than any they enjoyed.

2. We will take a brief view of the Jews, from the calling of Abraham to the coming of Christ—a period of two thousand years. Though often greatly afflicted, yet were they highly favored of God. They were, nevertheless, often very stupid and rebellious, and wandered far away from God; in consequence of which, they were visited with famine, pestilence, the sword, and captivity. Eventually, they became subject to the Romans, and paid tribute—Pilate being governor. The Roman luxuries and vices, as a natural consequence, were introduced into Palestine. The Jewish priests and people eventually became awfully corrupt in sentiment and practice. Th

most distinguished among them for learning and wisdom, were divided in opinion upon subjects of the highest importance, and involved in perpetual disputes. The most distinguished sects were the Pharisees, Sadducees, and Essenes. The two first are frequently mentioned in the Holy Scriptures, and the last by Josephus, the Jewish historian.

The Pharisees took their name from the following circumstances, viz. : by pretending to distinguish themselves from other Israelites by a more strict manner of life, and holding that there was an oral law handed down by tradition, which was binding as a rule of duty. They were, likewise, exceedingly punctilious in little matters ; "they tithed mint, anise, and cummin, whilst they omitted the weightier matters of the law : judgment, mercy, and faith." In many respects, likewise, they grossly misinterpreted the law.

The Sadducees were distinguished by their denying the existence of angels, the immortality of the human soul, the resurrection of the body, and, of consequence, future punishment. They, likewise, denied the existence of an oral law, and rejected the writings of the Old Testament, excepting the five books of Moses.

The Essenes believed in the immortality of the soul, but denied the resurrection of the body, and future punishment.

Whilst the leaders among the Jews were thus divided in sentiment, the great body of the people became grossly ignorant about the true character of God and his worship. They depended principally upon their works to justify them before God—particularly, upon the external washings enjoined in the law of Moses. They indeed drew nigh unto God with their mouth, while their hearts were far from him ; "they had eyes, but saw not ; ears, but heard not." Ignorance, doubt, and cold formality attended them when the "light" of which Simeon spake, in the text, appeared ; which light has been rising and spreading ever since. It dawned upon New England in 1620, when our pilgrim fathers landed at Plymouth. Its progress, considering its vast importance, has been slow ; but when we reflect on the feebleness of the means used, the deep depravity of the human heart, and the subtilty and power of the devil, it is astonishing that so much has been done. The light hath shined, not only all over New England, but over many mountains and vallies through this extended country.

Many Christian churches have been founded ; many temples erected in our villages, towns, and cities, and dedicated to the worship of Jehovah.

For many years, the light has been reflecting back its rays to the eastern continent from whence it originated—a large proportion of which still lies in pagan darkness. It has likewise extended its influence among the pagans of this country, and some of the islands of the Pacific Ocean.

It is now to be shown,

II. *That Christ, who claims to be the light of the world, is a greater light than any they enjoyed before he came.*

He, surely, is superior to all the pretended lights of the Gentile philosophers. Notwithstanding all their researches after knowledge, they had no rational system of theology ; they knew of no sure way for sinners to be pardoned. Many of their precepts were grossly impure, and much of their practice inconsistent with the great law of love.

Plato, the great Athenian philosopher, allowed of a community of wives.

Lycurgus, the celebrated Spartan legislator, allowed of a kind of thieving—a dextrous taking of things without the knowledge of their owners. He likewise justified the exposing of feeble children, and the destruction of slaves.

Solon, the famous legislator of Athens, allowed of sodomy ; and Seneca, a noted Stoic philosopher, (and it would seem the oracle of not a few in this enlightened age,) was the advocate both of drunkenness and suicide.

The above named individuals were among the most distinguished lights of the pagan world. Dim lights, indeed ! “blind leaders of the blind.” Jesus Christ, the true light, “the light of the Gentiles and the glory of the people Israel,” excels them all infinitely more than the natural sun does the smallest taper. He taught a system of theology, rational, grand, and glorious. He pointed out, most clearly, our duty to God and man, and the way in which a sinner may be pardoned, and God glorified. “Never man spake like this man.” His sermon on the mount, and his parables, are full of the richest instruction. Who, but an infidel, can read them, and not be charmed

with the sentiments they contain? Indeed, the Bible, as a book, throughout, excels all others: "it is a light shining in a dark place;" "life and immortality are brought to light through the gospel." It tends directly, not only to meliorate the condition of society at large, but to elevate the female character above every thing known among heathens; it points out the relative duties of males and females, and assures both that "God can be just, and the justifier of him that believeth in Jesus;" and that "the pure in heart shall see God." (Matt. v.)

2. Christ is a light superior to all those faint, typical lights of the Mosaic dispensation, which were "a shadow of things to come; but the body is of Christ."—(Col. ii., 17.)

The Jews, though once privileged far above the Gentiles, yet "saw through a glass darkly;" but when Christ came, they saw, or had the means of seeing, more clearly. Light then opened upon them like that of the sun upon the natural world, when suddenly it bursts from a cloud. Christ, when he came, corrected the errors of the Jewish doctors, and gave the true interpretation to the law of God. He taught most plainly the system of true benevolence. He said, "Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy mind, and thou shalt love thy neighbor as thyself;" "thou shalt love thine enemies, and bless them that curse you, and do good to them that despitefully use you and persecute you." Christ was, indeed, every way superior to Moses, the prophets, and John the Baptist, his immediate forerunner. The latter expressly said, "I baptize you with water, but he that cometh after me is mightier than I, whose shoes I am not worthy to bear." Christ is, indeed, the source of all light, natural and moral. "All things were made by him;" "with him is the residue of the Spirit;" and as the moon shines with borrowed light, Christ's ministering servants derive all their light, their gifts, and their graces, from him.

3. Christ is superior to all that were before him, as he "died, the just for the unjust"—"is the propitiation for our sins, and not for ours only, but also for the sins of the whole world." No created teacher can die, or could atone for a single sin. "There is none other name under heaven, given among men, whereby we must be saved, but the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth;" "other foundation

can no man lay than that is laid, which is Jesus Christ," "who his ownself bear our sins in his own body on the tree," when "he bowed his head and gave up the ghost."

Many places have long been favored with the preaching of the gospel, and many, where it hath been preached, have professedly believed in the crucified and risen Savior. Much has been done to save lost men; some success has attended what hath been done. Much more remains to be done, and more glorious success will follow. Most animating is the future prospect: "Thy sons shall come from far, and thy daughters shall be nursed at thy side;" "Shall a nation be born at once?" Animated with the future prospect, the prophet inquires, "Who are these that fly as a cloud, and as doves to their windows?"

It may be profitable, after what we have heard, to remark,

1. If the world really stood in need of greater light, then the coming of Christ, the true light, is a distinguishing favor. He came to preach the gospel to the poor, to promise deliverance to the captive, and the recovery of sight to the blind, viz., to such as are affected with moral blindness, and blindness the most disastrous. Well then might Simeon say, when he saw the salvation God had prepared before the face of all people, "Now lettest thou thy servant depart in peace, according to thy word."

2. Though the coming of Christ was a great favor, it was not our lot to see him with our bodily eyes, and to take him up in our arms as did Simeon; it will, nevertheless, be enough if we so conduct that the following record be made of us in heaven: "Whom, having not seen, we love; whom, though now ye see him not, yet, believing, ye rejoice with joy unspeakable and full of glory;" "He that believeth and is baptized, shall be saved." It will be awfully the reverse with those who believe not; they "shall be damned." Awful indeed will be the situation of every one upon whom the stone of the gospel shall fall; "it will grind him to powder."

3. It is, evidently, of the highest importance for all favored with the gospel that brings "good tidings of great joy," to realize that they are exalted to heaven in point of privilege, but that no privilege of itself, however distinguishing, will be sufficient to save them. "He

that believeth not, shall be damned ;” and Christ himself says, “ If ye believe not that I am he, ye shall die in your sins.”

The inhabitants of this society have long been favored with the gospel ; they have had not only the written, but the preached word of God. They had two ministers settled before my ordination. Each one preached about thirty years, and was then dismissed. Both eventually died in this place.

The most of those present, no doubt, realize that this day is the anniversary of my ordination. Sixty years ago, I was solemnly consecrated to the work of the ministry in this place ; and, though in feeble health when I entered the ministry, if my memory is correct, I have not, by indisposition, been kept from the house of God, during that long period, but eleven Sabbaths — six of them by the lung fever, in 1812, and five by breaking a little piece of skin upon the back of my right hand. My hand and life, for some time, were in great danger. The Rev. William Woodbridge, a class-mate and very particular friend, a boarder in my family, and very anxious about me, preached for me four Sabbaths, and on the fifth lay dead in my house, being suddenly called to give an account of his stewardship. “ One was taken, and the other left.” I would, therefore, as it were, “ set up a stone, calling it Ebenezer, saying, Hitherto hath the Lord helped me.” “ Bless the Lord, oh my soul, and all that is within me, bless his holy name.” “ Bless the Lord, oh my soul, and forget not all his benefits.”

I stand here to-day, as a monument of the mercy of God ! — spared, so far as I am acquainted, whilst every minister in New England, that began with me, is fallen ! I am still in health and comfort, and able to blow the gospel trumpet with a degree of energy, and to perform stately the common ministerial duties, “ in season and out of season,” by night or by day, at home and abroad, in fair weather or foul, with a good degree of comfort to myself. Upon this deeply interesting occasion, however, I make a solemn pause, and cast my eyes around to see the dear church and people of which I first took charge ; but I see them not in their seats. No, they are nearly all gone to their long home ! More than *seven hundred*, by me, have been entered on the bill of mortality ! That is, probably, a larger number than is now living within the limits of the ecclesiastical society. All

the members of the church are dead! All those who were legal voters in the society, and invited me to settle here in the ministry, are dead! There is a solitary instance of one whose age would have entitled him to a vote, but who held no personal estate distinct from his father's, and resided with his father, and did not vote. All, likewise, then sustaining the endearing relation of husband and wife in this place, are dead! I myself, one month and a day before my ordination, entered into this relation, and am now constrained to say, "I only am escaped alone to tell thee." For several years, I have been marrying the third generation from those who settled me. I have, likewise, married four of my own children, and one of them twice; and what is more remarkable, I married my own father to his second wife. There are now living in the limits of this ecclesiastical society, so far as I know, but seventeen persons, of any age, that were in it at the time of my settlement; and one of these was an infant, nine months old, and is now the senior deacon of the church.

The preceding bill of mortality includes my immediate predecessor and his wife; the two deacons of the church, and their wives, and three deacons who succeeded them, and their wives, and one deacon who is still living. It likewise includes five doctors, and two wives of one of them, and three of another. It also includes the justices of the peace and their wives, my own wife, and seven children, and a son-in-law, Rev. Barnabas Bruen;* and, what rarely takes place, one person of the fifth generation in the same house. What a change! How gloomy the prospect! "The fathers, where are they? and the prophets, do they live forever?" "The voice said, Cry; and I said, What shall I cry? All flesh is grass, and all the goodness thereof as the flower of the field. The grass withereth, the flower fadeth, because the Spirit of the Lord bloweth upon it. Surely, the people is grass. The grass withereth, the flower fadeth; but the word of the Lord endureth forever." That is a very comforting thought, well calculated to keep the mind from sinking while reviewing the desolations made by time.

3. Though we have been often warned, not only by the word, but

* Six days after my anniversary, 20th of March, my oldest child died — the wife of Rev. John Hyde.

by the providence of God, to be ready to exchange worlds, we have, apparently, been slow in getting ready. There never has been, so far as I can learn, a general revival of religion in this place. During my ministry, there have been several seasons of great excitement, and a considerable number of hopeful conversions. The greatest number who ever professed faith in Christ, in one year, is forty-one; and the greatest number who have done so at one time, is twenty-one. Some years, no one has come out from the world and publicly professed subjection to Christ. The two last years, there has been only a solitary instance in each year; and, what should be a solemn warning against procrastination, one of the persons delayed this until the last Sabbath she was ever able to come to the house of God!

Though the whole number who have publicly professed their faith in Christ, is small, I trust all who have been my stated hearers will bear witness that, apparently, it has never been my aim to be a dry, metaphysical preacher; but, to know nothing among my hearers "but Jesus Christ, and him crucified"—to preach what are usually termed the doctrines of grace, and to press them upon the consciences of the hearers. Though it has never been fashionable in this place, publicly to profess religion, yet I hope I have had more real success in winning souls to Christ than has publicly appeared. I am inclined thus to hope, from the fact that a young lady, brought up under my ministry, whose parents were not professors of religion, and who, with their family, moved to a distant part of the country, twenty years afterward, affectionately addressed me by letter, announcing the joyful intelligence that she hoped she became pious under my ministry. She entered into particulars, and expressed a strong attachment to me, as a minister of Christ, and an ardent desire to see me. We have occasionally corresponded ever since. Another young lady, who, with her mother and sister, removed to a distant part of the country, some years after, when visiting the place of her nativity, informed me, in conversation on the all-important subject, that her first religious impressions arose from some observations that I made when visiting the school she then attended.

I likewise hope I have done some good by feeding Christ's sheep. Once, after preaching a lecture at a private house, an aged lady, waiting for the coming of the Lord, said, "you have strengthened

me. Another lady, about ninety years of age, and who was still constant in her attendance at the house of God, when in conversation with her on the importance of constant attendance, replied, "Sir, I do not retain much of the preaching, but it tastes good when I am there."

I further hope I have been in some measure useful in visiting your schools several times in a year. I have never failed of doing this, excepting one Spring, when confined by sickness. For many years, it is well known, I took a deep interest in the education of youth. About a dozen of your own sons, (one half of whom have entered the ministry,) as well as many others from abroad, I have fitted for college; a much greater number I have assisted in obtaining an English education. I hope I mention none of these things boastingly, but that God may have the glory. "By the grace of God I am what I am"—comparatively faint, yet pursuing; determined, so long as God gives me strength, notwithstanding all my discouragements, to continue sounding the gospel trumpet.

I recollect that, in Joshua's day, seven priests, bearing seven trumpets of rams' horns, compassed the city of Jericho seven times, yet the walls did not immediately fall; but it was said, "The seventh day, ye shall compass the city seven times, and the priests shall blow with the trumpets; and it shall come to pass, when they shall make a long blast, and when ye hear the sound of the trumpets, all the people shall shout with a great shout, and the wall of the city shall fall down flat." And Joshua, on the seventh day, after they had compassed the city seven times, said to the people, "Shout, for the Lord hath given you the city." I also recollect, that the prophet Elijah, in a time of long drought, when his servant, who stood on mount Carmel, and announced that he saw a little cloud, like a man's hand, rise out of the sea, said to Ahab, "Get thee up, eat and drink, for there is the sound of abundance of rain."

For some time past, I have noticed more of a praying spirit in the church in this place than is usual. This has raised my hope that God has some good in store for us. I hope he will soon cause the Holy Spirit to come down, and revive the drooping graces of his people, like the gentle dew,—yes, more—like the fertilizing shower, upon the mown grass;—more still, like the mountain torrent, bearing

all before it, till every proud sinner shall be brought into cordial subjection to Christ, and a family altar erected in every house. Should I live to see this take place, I hope I should, with some degree of sincerity, say, as did Simeon, holding the infant Savior in his arms, "Now lettest thou thy servant depart in peace, according to thy word." I should then hope you will be careful to maintain the gospel here after my decease, and that, through the grace of God, we shall all eventually meet in heaven.



Heaven is a land where troubles cease,
 Where toils and tears are o'er —
 The sunny clime of rest and peace,
 Where cares distract no more,
 And not the shadow of distress
 Dims its unsullied blessedness.

Heaven is the home where spirits dwell,
 Who wandered here a while,
 And, seeing things invisible,
 Departed with a smile,
 To hail, amid sepulchral night,
 The morning of eternal light.

Heaven is the everlasting throne,
 Where angels veil their sight;
 Whence He, the high and holy one,
 Throughout those realms of light,
 Diffuses by one thrilling glance,
 The glory of his countenance.

Heaven is the place where Jesus lives,
To plead his dying blood,
While to his prayer the Father gives
An unknown multitude,
Whose harps and tongues, through endless days,
Shall crown his head with songs of praise.

Heaven is the temple whither prayer
From saints on earth ascends;
The dwelling of the spirit, whence
The influence descends,
Like heavenly dew, to cheer and bless
His children in the wilderness.

Heaven is the dwelling place of joy,
The home of light and love,
Where faith and hope in rapture die,
And ransomed souls above
Drink in, beside the eternal throne,
Bliss everlasting and unknown."

